

## GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME

**TBAM trekked across the Tasman to ride one of its favourite events with one of its favourite groups of people.** The NZ Safari was the same fabulous, scenic, fun ride it's been for many years, but somehow, year after year, it just gets more and more enjoyable. The 2011 ride set the standard high. As high as Mount Messing-My-Pants itself. >

## SETTING OUT

**TBAM has been a big fan of New Zealand's Yamaha Safari since 2008, when, at the invitation of Yamaha NZ, we trekked over there and rode the new WR250R.** The bike was good, but the scenery and riding was mind-blowing. The rivers and streams were crystal clear, the views impossibly beautiful, and the mountains were just so incredibly mountainy. We nearly wept into our gearbags at the sight of it all (we didn't, but, because all those tears might've caused a problem with quarantine on the way back into Australia).

Since then the annual NZ Safari has become firmly established as our favourite dualsport ride anywhere ever, and as far as we're concerned, the best thing about Christmas is it means it's only a few weeks to NZ.

For 2011, Britton Adventures again extended a generous invitation to TBAM, and Yamaha NZ again offered a bike. We were so there!

**The ride moves around the South Island a little, but for 2011 the trails wound their way through the magnificent Mackenzie country, covering some of the ground used in 2008.** It could've covered exactly the same ground as 2008 and we'd've been happy, but instead the Brittons, Mike and Angela, and their crew of diligent workers, had moved the base to the tourist destination of Twizel, and so offered a good mix of some of the best features of previous years with new riding offered by the new location. Also, in 2009, the whole show operated out of a single resort at Hanmer Springs. In 2011 the event was headquartered at a different town each night, meaning the whole thing – luggage, paperwork, spares and all – had to be trucked from place to place, adding a new dimension.

It turned out to not make much difference. Like everything else the Brittons do, it was covered thoroughly without any visible excitement or stress.

Well... almost everything the Brittons do.

There's the small matter of the route sheet on the first day.

## READY AND WAITING

**Briefings for the Safari are done the night before, so Friday found TBAM rolling into the beautiful, picturesque town of Twizel, ready to unpack and get busy on the bike Yamaha NZ had provided.** There'd been an email or two from the tremendously polite and accommodating Peter Payne to say there'd be a bike waiting, and there'd be knobbies supplied if we chose to fit them. After speaking to Mike Britton, we decided to stick with the Michelin TCs, and this turned out to be a good decision. Some people may wonder how far you can ride an adventure bike on a flat front tyre. We don't know for sure, but we now have some idea.

So with a sparkling new XTZ660 – with a mere 40km on the odo – kitted out to perfection by Phil Winter and the Yamaha tech team, TBAM found itself with not much to do before briefing.

## DON'T MISS!

**Briefing was the usual light-hearted and humorous run-through of the features and opportunities for cock-up on the following day.** It all seemed fairly straightforward as Mike told the assembled riders about it, and soon enough everyone was off to bed. The sun doesn't set in the area until around 10.00pm in summer, and it was worth the trip just to see that beautiful display each evening.

Saturday turned out to be sunny and warm, and it was a happy and eager 75 riders who departed the Mackenzie Country Inn expecting around 250km of premium dualsport riding. There were several girls and a few pillions, and, as always, the organisers had ensured everyone, barring incidents, could reasonably expect to ride the terrain.

And so it proved. The morning was vista after heartbreaking vista along dirt roads and through farm paddocks and mountain trails, showing the very best of what this amazing country has to offer. TBAM's XTZ was kitted out with some amazing after-market gear and was probably the perfect bike for the task in hand. It roosted along the "shingle" (gravel) roads and swooped and slid its way through the farm tracks with incredible ease. Between

the bike, the trail and the people on the ride, life was about as pleasant as it could be.

Even the trail section, which turned out to be a rocky trail along a lengthy ridge, was no real problem for the Yamaha, although a slip or miscalculation could've been a disaster. The bigger bikes did well to stay off the section and stick with the optional cut-out, and in retrospect, TBAM probably shouldn't have taken a spanking new Ténéré up there, either. We did but, and it wasn't quite so spanking when we came back down.

From there it was more fabulous dirt road and farm trail into the lunch stop, catered by a tiny local school, which turned out to be an amazing, mouth-watering collection of salads and roast meats that really set a rider up for the afternoon.

Which was good really, because at one point the route sheet said, "Take grass track on left. DON'T MISS".

This important point was marked at 2.3km. All TBAM could find at 2.3km was a flat, grassy area with tracks to bejesus and back all over creation. The tracks had been caused by the other 74 riders roosting around in large circles trying to find a track that didn't exist.

What do you do in a situation like that?

Fortunately, we're experienced in nav rallies now, and we knew exactly what to do. We joined in, roosting around like bastards and using up as much fuel as we could, making sure our trip meters were as far out of kilter as possible.

After a while we decided to just follow someone. We followed several different someones until we spied an electricity company truck way over in a far paddock. We rode over to ask them where the hell we were, only to find the truck abandoned and no-one in sight. We could see a long, long way in every direction, so that wasn't very comforting.

Then a dust trail appeared, and in the spirit of joining in, we piss-bolted to intersect and fall in behind the new rider.

As it turned out, the new rider was Clubby from *TrailZone* magazine. He actually knew where he was, but after all the circles and loops he'd done, he had two-fifths of cock-all fuel left. A little dealing was done and TBAM finished the day following the little WR250R back to the day's destination, the Peppers Blue Water Resort at Lake Tekapo. ➤



The walking bridge was cute. The frigging gate on this side was a barrier set by Satan for the non-believers. Apparently TBAM is a non-believer, because we couldn't get the mongrel thing open.



Another gate! So many mother-fudging gates! A lot of the ride went through private property, so gates were part and parcel of the deal. There were some stropky ones, too, and some set on nasty angles.



There was only one fair-dinkum water crossing in the three days. Easy-peasy!



Oh dear. The trail section on the first day offered plenty of opportunity to get into difficulty.

These guys deserve a medal of some kind. They roosted around – including the trail up Mount Messing – and made it look easy.



## NO WUKKAS

At briefing that night Mike dealt with the questionable route sheet directions by a lengthy explanation over dinner. Whether or not anyone else could concentrate on what he was saying while food of that amazing standard was on offer we don't know. We couldn't, but. And whatever the explanation we're sure it was entirely reasonable. The lamb was fabulous!

The next morning the Yamaha guys grabbed the XTZ and set about finding the strange squeaking noise coming from the front end.

"Did you hit a rock?" we were asked.

We'd hit thousands of the pricks on that poxy trail section, but we thought it best to be a little cagey.

"Ken oath!" we blurted. "We nailed hundreds of the buggers! Big, nasty bastards they were."

As always, the Yamaha tech team smiled and carried on its professional way, and in a few minutes the Ténére was back to its silent, smooth self... unlike the rider.

The second day was marked by wind.

We're not talking about blowing a bit of a gale here. We're talking about the kind of wind that made standing up difficult, holding a camera steady near impossible, and

riding across some exposed ridges a frigging balancing act worthy of an NRL team that's cheating the salary cap. And it seemed as though there was a lot of trail along ridges and high mountains on this day, so everyone got well and truly blown.

No wait...

Whatever.

The scenery was once again fabulous, but there was more challenge in keeping the bike upright than negotiating the mountain terrain, and even the shingle roads demanded real concentration. The wind was strong enough to move a bike through the loose surface and into trouble, and with the XTZ very comfortable at speeds of 150kph and higher, it was all very exciting.

There were no "trail" loops on this day, or for the rest of the event, so it was all-in on a truly fabulous 300-or-so kilometres. Lunch was another school-catered extravaganza and the day wound down to a trouble-free, wonderful conclusion at Methven Resort, Methven.

Once more an amazing dinner and a good-humoured briefing topped off a great, but challenging, day.

## AND ON THE THIRD DAY...

A light rain set in on the Sunday night. TBAM correspondent and local weather shaman Dave Britten confidently predicted the rain would persist for the morning but be gone by lunch.

He was right, of course. TBAM correspondents know their stuff!

The high point of the day – quite literally – was set to be Mount Messing, a 1550m-high pile of slag and pointy rock with a switchback trail up the side.

TBAM had ridden Mount Messing a few years back and knew what to expect, so bolted from the lunch stop to be in front of the rock-throwing, corner-rutting, bike-dropping pack, and was chuckling to itself as the mighty 660 cut its way up the trail like a Green politician through a Labor policy.

Until the front tyre punctured and blurted its essential air into the rocks and crud surrounding it.

It'd be a fair call to say, "Should've stopped and fixed it!", but there were a couple of things to be balanced against that idea. The track was narrow and there were 74 bikes behind the TBAM Yamaha, all wanting a clear run (an hour behind, as it turned out, but we couldn't know that). Not

only would it have been seriously inconsiderate to other riders to stop and repair the tyre there, it might even have been dangerous. The track was a bit narrow. Not narrow enough that you'd accidentally slip over the edge, but a fall with a bit of a roll and some leopard crawling could've been risky\*.

So the XTZ forged on to the top. And once at the top, it seemed a very long walk back down to where all the action would be.

So the XTZ roared into life and headed off down the trail, flat tyre and all.

From there the plucky little bike just kept roaring, and before anyone knew where they were, the parking lot of the Mackenzie Country Inn was flopping under the flappy front tyre and the event was over.

According to Mike and the crew at Britton Adventures, it was about 200km from Mount Messing to the finish, so for anyone who might be wondering, you can get at least that from a flat Michelin TC. And that's good to know.

Curiously, the wheel itself didn't last any longer than the tyre.

Interesting.

## STILL THE ONE

We've probably been a little light-on for detail here, but the pics will tell you most of what you need to know. They can't tell you about the brilliant organisation, the incredible atmosphere, the unfailing good humour of everyone involved and the sheer joy of being part of such a fabulous event, but we're hoping, if you're still reading, you understand that now as well.

It's still our favourite dualsport event, and unless something truly exceptional happens, it'll stay that way.

### THE BIKE!

Yamaha NZ didn't just make a bike available to TBAM this year, it made available a brand-spanking-new XTZ660 Ténére with some very nice after-market equipment. The bike had only done 40km when TBAM mounted up and flung it at the first trail, and it was an absolute gem. It still felt a little heavy, but the handling and general feel of the bike was so far above the stockers we'd ridden, it'd be beyond us to explain. We doubt there was a bike entered that was more ideally suited than ours. Fuel range was more than ample, the motor drove hard without being rough or intimidating, and, best of all, the handling was impeccable. It swept along and through the farm tracks and mountain passes with real grace. Check out some of the bits and pieces...



Brand new and beautifully prepared. In our dreams we ride bikes like this one.



A pair of Akros! Hoo-aaah! The bike sounded fabulous of course, but we also thought throttle response was the tiniest bit smoother than stock.

Well, hello! That explains a great deal. This particular XTZ handled incredibly well. It was ideal on the farm and mountain tracks, and was effortless on the high-speed shingle roads.



The clay cliffs of the first day.

